Meta-Game Introduction Scene

In a near-future, Earth-like world, humanity has adopted a new and seemingly more humane form of imprisonment: medically induced comas. During their sentence, prisoners remain unconscious, detached from society as they serve their time. Advances in medical technology have made these comas nearly risk-free, a stark contrast to the high risks and potential damage they carry in our time. In this era, prisoners can be safely kept unconscious for years, with minimal harm and without the psychological toll that traditional prisons often impose. This approach is seen as a safer and more efficient way to house prisoners, reducing the risks of violence, overcrowding, and mental deterioration.

This is the fate of the player as they are convicted of treason and confined to a coma-like state. Under this new system, a life sentence is essentially a death sentence in terms of experience; prisoners convicted of severe crimes lose the entirety of their lives unless they win an appeal or serve out extremely long sentences. The player, sentenced to 50 years to life, faces the loss of 50 years of experience and consciousness if all appeals fail, effectively severing them from the world.

The game begins with a blank black screen, representing the player's unconsciousness. Slowly, simple text appears, simulating a message reaching them through a brain-computer interface (BCI). The player learns they’ve been granted a unique opportunity: to participate in a clandestine government research project aimed at developing a highly advanced artificial general intelligence (AGI). This groundbreaking BCI, when deeply integrated with the prisoner’s brain, can capture an unprecedented level of real-time cognitive data—rich decision-making patterns and nuanced emotional responses that will help train the AGI with unmatched sophistication.

The choice is stark: the player can accept the offer and face a screening test to qualify for the project, or decline and resume their coma sentence, leading inevitably to loss of most, if not all, or their lives. Given their unconscious state, declining the offer would mean an immediate and most likely a final end.

Should the player accept, they'll first undergo a screening to prove their suitability for the project, competing against other volunteer prisoners. Success in this test means formal admission into the program. Other prisoners will be admitted into the program as well, and they’ll join competing research teams tasked with training the most effective AI possible.

The ultimate incentive? A commutation of their sentence, contingent on fully meeting the program’s requirements and training the best AGI among the different research teams. This will include helping their research team achieve their objectives and fully participate in all aspects of the project through 100% completion.

However, there’s a significant risk involved. To make the experience more interactive than the initial text-based communication, the project would require an experimental, and progressively more invasive BCI system. While the process is designed to be reversed, it remains unproven and carries a high risk of permanent damage. The technology is so risky, in fact, that even a desperate government behind this project has turned to prisoners rather than regular research volunteers. Due to how invasive the full BCI system is, the sensory experience will intensify gradually, scaling up if the player proves their ability to navigate and excel in the initial stages of the project.

Overview

Requirements for Introduction Section of Game:

1. Fundamentally, I want to weave all my game making efforts into one “meta-game” with some kind of plausible reason those elements are all connected into one sandbox experience with an over-arching goal.
2. I want the game I am making to not just load into a menu and present itself as a game. In fact, I wanted a way to bring the player into the game that was immersive as possible within the technical limitations of my current ability.
3. I currently have no technical capability, so I need to start as small as possible within my game design constraints. A quick synopsis of my overall game design constraints is that I am making a Sandbox Simulation Strategy RPG. The simplest RPG is going to be text-based.

How The Introduction Presented Meets These Requirements

1. The coma and brain interface combination explains very well why the player is only seeing text at the beginning and sets the stage for a slow technical logical ramp-up for the game By tech ramp up I mean: starting with text only, moving to UI elements, basic graphics, and on; all while expanding the set of actions, features, and mechanics available to the player.
2. We start the narrative from the first screen of the game as I wanted. More importantly, I can introduce typically out-of-game elements like menus and UI as in-game elements necessitated with how the comatose prisoner interacts with the simulation. More broadly this is going to lay the narrative groundwork for the completion tracking and procedural mechanics of the sandbox of the meta-game.
3. Additionally, the player's motivation is established clearly: to achieve 100% completion and outperform other participants to secure their freedom. Within this framework, specific in-game objectives will drive players to explore and experiment with all that the sandbox offers, underpinned by this overarching goal.
4. This opening also allows the player to meet the lead researcher of the project they join. The lead researcher is going to serve a “game master” type that will narrate at times and introduce the player to game elements etc. Rather than just being a tutorial interface, the researcher will serve as character in the story who should feel personal to the player.   
     
   Ultimately the researcher is really going to be a version of myself. I will present the researcher as a very young, promising candidate who needs to learn everything about making a simulation sandbox world from the ground up. This way I can progress the player through the complexity of the sandbox gradually according to my actual abilities and present my point of view as I am making the game. The slow-up technological ramp-up of the game is also backed up by the narrative that the brain computer interface needs to gradually be ramped up due to its invasiveness.
5. This part of the game is essentially a digital novel outside of the player choosing to participate. If the player says no there, the game will close itself after a double check. The test in the narrative if the player chooses to participate will slightly ramp up the complexity of the game by introducing choices for the player to make, then allowing more options, then UI, then stats and mechanics, then primitive graphics etc.
6. The text adventure will be some form of the player competing against other prisoner candidates to earn a spot in my researcher’s simulation. Other simulation projects will have their own competitions for their spots in their simulations.